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FM AMEMBASSY SEOUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5305
INFO RUCNKOR/KOREA COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUACAAA/COMUSKOREA INTEL SEOUL KOR PRIORITY
RHMFISS/COMUSFK SEOUL KOR PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 001274

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/11/2019
TAGS: PGOV KS KN
SUBJECT: DP CHAIR CHUNG URGES U.S. TO ENGAGE NORTH KOREA;
LOOKS TO REVIVE OPPOSITION PARTY

Classified By: AMBASSADOR KATHLEEN STEPHENS. Reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: At an August 10 lunch with the Ambassador, opposition Democratic Party (DP) Chairman Chung Sye-kyun urged the United States to engage the DPRK in dialogue, asserting the U.S. and the ROK shared responsibility with the DPRK for the breakdown of the Six-Party Talks. Chung said former President Kim Dae-jung (KDJ), though hospitalized in critical condition, was eager to hear news of President Clinton's successful visit to Pyongyang. Chung unfavorably compared President Lee Myung-bak to President Clinton, calling Lee a "shameful spectator" for failing to win release of the ROK citizens held in the North. The DP, yet to find its political legs after loosing the presidency in 2007 and the National Assembly in 2008, has appointed a committee to study the party's successes and failures of the last ten years and make recommendations for the future. Chung said that with KDJ unlikely to leave the hospital (i.e. his prognosis is poor) and former President Roh Moo-hyun's suicide in May, the progressive wing of Korea's body politic was essentially leaderless. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Comment: Chung appears to be stepping up efforts to revive the voice of the Democratic Party, whose low poll numbers and minority status in the National Assembly have left the party "looking for a new way forward." It is too soon to tell whether Chung can provide the leadership the party needs, but he has not succeeded yet. And with increased attention likely to be focused in the coming days on KDJ's legacy and, by contrast, the poor state of the DP, Chung may be forced to prove that he can deliver. End Comment.

North Korea

¶3. (C) During lunch with the Ambassador on August 10, opposition Democratic Party (DP) Chairman Chung Sye-kyun urged the United States to pursue dialogue with North Korea. A lack of trust between the parties, he said, had led to the breakdown of the Six-Party Talks and the blame did not belong entirely to the DPRK. He allowed, however, that the DPRK, by its actions and rhetoric, had not helped itself, nor had it won, the support or sympathy of the South Korean public.

¶4. (C) Chung welcomed former President Clinton's successful mission to Pyongyang to obtain the release of the two AMCIT journalists. He was highly critical of President Lee's failure to win release of the Hyundai Asan employee detained at Kaesong on March 30 and the fishermen detained on July 30, complaining that Lee was playing the role of a "shameful spectator." He said Lee's North Korea policy was a failure that Lee should recognize and change.

Kim Dae-jung

¶15. (C) Chung said Park Jie-won, KDJ's former Chief of Staff and current National Assembly member, called KDJ after President Clinton's trip to Pyongyang and asked if KDJ, who is hospitalized in critical condition, wanted to hear the press accounts of the trip. KDJ, though unable to speak, indicated that he did and Park read the first paragraph. KDJ indicated he wanted to hear more and listened to Park read the press article to the end.

Planning DP's Comeback

¶16. (C) Chung said that with KDJ unlikely to leave the hospital and with Roh Moo-hyun's suicide in May, the progressive wing of Korea's body politic was leaderless. Chung said he had formed a committee to review the DP's successes and failures of the past ten years and to make recommendations on the party's future. He said the party was "looking for a new way forward" and that local elections in June 2010 would be the first test of the party's attempt at rejuvenating itself. The party, he said, plans on making the nation-wide local elections a referendum on President Lee's performance.

¶17. (C) Chung, who lost 5 kilos before ending a six-day hunger strike to oppose the GNP's passage of media reform bills (Ref A), said he is leading a nation-wide effort to generate protests against the GNP's media laws -- though at the height of Korea's summer vacation season Chung said it was difficult to know how much success the campaign would have. Chung

conceded that opposition to the GNP's media reform bills put the DP in the position of supporting media laws implemented during the dictatorial regime of former President Chun Doo-hwan but that the party politically had no choice. The DP appealed the passage of the laws to the Constitutional Court, which should issue a ruling by late September. Chung worried, however, that the Court might not rule in the DP's favor because the Court is susceptible to political influence. GNP contacts have echoed Chung's view of the court, noting that a majority of the Court's members are GNP appointees.

STEPHENNS